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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

14 July 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Charles E. Waterman, VC/NIC

SUBJECT: Potential for Pressure on Syria

1. There are no realistic "quick fix" pressures on Syria which would affect the Assad regime's attitudes on Lebanon or the Reagan initiative over the next six months. I believe this fact of life should be recognized as a starting point. (The attached memo explains Assad's strengths and weaknesses in more depth.)

2. There is, however, a fatal flaw in the regime

This flaw is the questionable legitimacy of a minority (the Alawites) ruling in an unpopular manner within its own populace while surrounded by hostile states. It is in order to enhance its legitimacy that Assad acts more "rejectionist" of compromise solutions than other Arabs - both in his rhetoric and some of his actions. Underlying this veneer, however, is a pragmatic mindset which evaluates pluses and minuses of given policies quite accurately.

4. A very solid - albeit circumstantial - case can be made that many recent Syrian actions result in net effects which are favorable to the Israelis. In Lebanon, they are giving the excuse for a continued Israeli occupation in the south. On Palestine, they are gaining control of the Palestine Liberation Organization and generally sabotaging any attempt to obtain Arab territory back. Inside Syria, they are repressing brutally the more fundamentalist and anti-Israeli Islamic portions of their populace. There is a latent perception in the Arab world that this is so, and this is enhanced by the regime's obvious non-Arab character.

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